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Black-Edged Legend Is Ended In a Vulgar Miami Bar Brawl

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MIAMI—Ricardo Morales departed life as he had lived it, violently and under a cloak of so much intrigue that no one can be sure what happened.

As his friends and enemies tell it, however, one thing is certain: the .32-caliber bullet that penetrated the Cuban exile's head from behind eliminated a man who had made himself into a black-edged legend to be told and cherished throughout Miami, Latin America and, perhaps, Langley, Va.

After a month of investigation, the Dade County Public Safety Department has concluded that the spy, counterspy, mercenary, confessed murderer, bomber, informer, dope dealer and operator extraordinary was shot in a vulgar bar brawl, enraged because he thought someone had called him a *maricon*, or homosexual.

Morales allegedly was killed just before midnight Dec. 20 while reaching for the .38 strapped to his ankle in what Detective Steve Roadruck concluded was justifiable homicide for which no one should be charged.

"If you believe that, I've got a piece of expressway I'll sell you cheap," said one of Morales' attorneys, John Komorowski. "I'm convinced that somebody needed Morales dead and just executed him. There's no question about it; it was a set up. Who? God only knows. It could have been the Cubans, the anti-Castro Cubans, the druggers, the CIA, anybody."

In his 43 years, Morales had been involved with all of them, and more, in and out of the nether world of Miami. Miami is a place where simple

where cocaine deals make people suddenly rich, occult and dead. It is where dissidents from a dozen Latin and Caribbean countries plot revolutions. It is a city so used to intrigue that a magazine for Latin visitors lists the CIA local phone number along with those of hotels and all-night pharmacies.

So from Morales' family and friends, some of whom were also his enemies at one time or another, have come several theories about why he might have been shot and by whom. None is provable, but they give an idea of how Morales lived and maybe how he died.

"Monkey" Morales, as the Miami press called him, had claimed that he helped plan and carry out the 1976 bombing of a Cubana airliner, in which 73 persons died near Barbados. Morales claimed to friends that the C4-plastique explosive used to blow up the plane came from a storeroom of DISIP, the Venezuelan intelligence service in which Morales was then a high officer, and a then-DISIP director, Orlando Garcia, knew about the plot.

Morales explained that most of those aboard, some listed as the Cuban fencing team, were actually important regional operatives of the DGI, the Cuban version of the CIA.

Morales also was the chief informer for Miami police last year in an elaborate drug investigation called "Operation Tick-Talks" because of a bug hidden behind a clock in a suspect's home. The case was eventually thrown out of court because a judge ruled that Morales lacked credibility, but not before Rafael Villaverde and his brother Raul were charged with conspiracy to distribute cocaine.

Friends say Morales had long wanted to nail Rafael Villaverde, a

Pigs veteran, had been a CIA operative in Miami during the agency's Cuban destabilization campaign in the early 1960s. Morales' friends say they did not know why Morales had it in for him. But Morales also was a CIA operative in the anti-Cuban campaign and a friend of former CIA agent Edwin P. Wilson.

As a young CIA officer, Wilson had participated in the anti-Cuba campaign for which Miami was the chief launching pad. Anti-Cuban campaign veterans Rafael and Raul Villaverde have said they met Wilson in Geneva in September, 1976, because they thought Wilson was recruiting them for a CIA plan to kill an international terrorist called Carlos the Jackal. But by then Wilson was working for Col. Muammar Qaddafi of Libya. According to U.S. investigators, he was proposing instead a plot to kill a Libyan dissident.

The Villaverdes went to U.S. authorities with the proposal. Their denunciation became part of an investigation that has landed Wilson in jail.

Morales was killed in a bar called Cherries in Key Biscayne, the plush island off Miami where Richard M. Nixon once had a home. After an early evening of drinks in the section called Little Havana, he had gone there in his red Cadillac with Nancy Cid Lamazares and Juan Fernandez.

Lamazares was an old friend, the widow of German Lamazares, a Cuban exile murdered in 1973. Morales was the chief informer who led to the indictment of Armando Elidio Ruiz on charges that he killed Lamazares. Morales was also the man, by his account in a later court deposition, who killed Ruiz with an automatic pistol after Ruiz was acquitted and showed up on Morales' front porch one night.